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Inside Report... By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

Humphrey and Foreign Policy

WHEN TOP policy makers of the U.S. Government gathered about the long, gleaming table in the White House Cabinet Room to make Viet-Nam decisions, there was one notable absentee: Hubert H. Humphrey.

This was no exceptional omission. By no stretch of the imagination is the Vice President in the inner policy-making circle around President Johnson. He is at arm's length from the critical decisions.

Indeed, some high officials inside the Government question whether Humphrey could jump in and assume immediate direction over all foreign policy if a vacancy suddenly existed in the Presidency.

ALTHOUGH successive Presidents have made progress in dealing the Vice President in on the great problems of national security (Vice President Harry S. Truman didn't even know the existence of the A-bomb) there is a long way yet to go, and often less and less time to make critical nuclear-age decisions.

Consider, for example, the two great foreign crises that have confronted Mr. Johnson—the occupation of Santo Domingo and the more recent sessions about how far and how fast to escalate the war in Viet-Nam.

Humphrey was on the edge of decision-making in both these crises, but not in



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the inner circle. He was not consulted during the earliest, most desperate stages of the Dominican crisis. Later, however, as the U.S. dilemma there became chronic, he sat in on many of the President's strategy sessions.

As for Viet-Nam, the Vice President is a regular at all of the President's large-scale briefings for members of Congress, but is not a fixture in the secret meetings of the decision-making group.

Apart from crises, he does not have automatic, regular exposure to top secret reports and briefings from the Central Intelligence Agency and the State and Defense Departments. With so much pressure to rush this top-priority material into the White House, it is inevitable that Humphrey sometimes is forgotten.

NO PARTICLE of blame can be attached to the Vice President himself for this

state of affairs. Although Lyndon Johnson as Vice President chewed up State Department briefing officers for breakfast and sometimes rebuffed efforts to fill him in, Humphrey craves information of all kinds on foreign policy.

In fact, early this summer he jumped over conventional channels of information to investigate some of the Vietnamese problems through a novel route. Dispatched by the President to Ft. Bragg, N.C., to greet returning Special Forces soldiers (the natty green beret men) from Viet-Nam, Humphrey turned what was billed as a purely ceremonial mission into an ingenious fact-finding mission.

Humphrey asked the returning soldiers to give him their own private version of what was going wrong in Viet-Nam. He warned their superior officers that he would hold them personally responsible if any of the soldiers were punished for telling the truth as they saw it. The result: The Vice President got an earful of down-to-earth problems in Viet-Nam not available even to the President.

But the Vice President of the United States hasn't much time to spend prowling through barracks and getting the word from the troops. He ought to get his information through more conventional channels—the confidential and secret channels that too often are clogged up.

THIS IS a dilemma of government, not a problem of party politics or personality. But even in the political sphere, Humphrey's arm's-length removal from foreign policy decisions is certainly no help—particularly in view of the sudden emergence of Arthur Goldberg as foreign policy star.

Goldberg, former Cabinet member, former Supreme Court Justice, and now Ambassador to the United Nations, is a man with Johnson-sized ambitions. Some Democrats are already speculating about the possibility of Goldberg's moving onto the presidential ticket.

But this is speculation as thin as a gossamer wing. The fundamental point is that the Vice President ought to be at the vital center of foreign policy questions. Unfortunately, he hasn't been before and he isn't today.

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